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THE TECHNOCOMMERCIMUM: ASSEMBLAGES OF THE MECHANOSPHERE

MASHINES ASSEMBLAGE, CAPITALISM, DELEUZE/GUATTARI, MACHINES,
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Everything becomes imperceptible, everything is becoming-imperceptible on the plane of consistency, which is nevertheless precisely where the imperceptible is seen and heard. It is the Planomenon, or the Rhizosphere, the Criterium (and still other names, as the number of dimensions increases. At n dimensions, it is called the Hypersphere, the Mechanosphere. It is the abstract Figure, or rather, since it has no form itself, the abstract Machine of which each concrete

assemblage is a multiplicity, a becoming, a segment, a vibration. And the abstract machine is the intersection of them all.

—Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

Over the years my interest in technology, capitalism, and philosophy have lead me into some very strange territory, territory of thought that has for the most part deterritorialized my assumptions, prejudices, and beliefs in what it means to be human. Lately this convergence to technology and commerce have begun reformatting the very structures of political economics and the liberal world view that have since the Enlightenment Age been the cornerstone of modern society and civilization. Our universalists pretensions which guided most of the globalization of commerce during this era of expansion have led us into war, climacteric devastation, and the collapse of the very value systems that once embedded us in the world.

Having grown up dirt poor, realizing hunger is not just a *word* but an experience – an excruciating bodily experience that stays with one for the rest of one's natural born life -: an experience that can be quantified and calculated, brought under the power of thought and affect, made to concentrate ever last thought under the tutelage of pain and discomfort. It was then that I began to realize experience, not abstract thought is the foundation of all our human propensities. Our bodily aches and pains, our emotional turmoil's, panics, feelings of loneliness and abject horror in the face of the inhumanity of others as one is formed and shaped by their *gaze* to the detriment and shame of being human. Self-denigration is something to be overcome, something that drives one to become other than one is. Each of us learns through the bodily functions of our pains and tribulations to rely on that ancient cunning of the animal, the intelligence in the bones and flowing blood, the biochemical factories that awaken one to the slow and repetitive needs of the body in its necessity to survive and propagate.

Body comes first, thought comes much later. We acquire language, it doesn't come pre-packaged in the hollows of our brain. The disposition to appropriate it is there, but not the actual content of its selective and cultural enframing. When go from the babbling infant cries of the child to the grasping vocabularies that our parents impart across the youthful years of our infancy we begin to change, to become indoctrinated into the cultural mind of our linguistic heritage. Some acquire multiple language, multiple cultures; others become monolingualists, and bound by the tyranny of a monocultural outlook which shapes and modulates the mind and body to the point that it is not easy to step outside ones frame into the multiplicity of others who do not share one's modes of being in the world.

As an autodidact with no formal training in philosophy, history, literature, sciences, etc. I fumbled through the vast trove of our Western culture and heritage like a blind man seeking the light. Here and there I found certain men and women who spoke to me, who shared that deep sense of knowledge and wisdom that spoke to me of things I instinctively knew but had up to the moment I'd read them no words for. It was these few beings who became my guides into the uncharted lands of our cultural labyrinths. Here and there I found other voices that spoke to me, argued with me, brought me to a pitch and forced me to think and expand my mental and

physical horizons. Sometimes it was difficult, the abstruse and arcane verbiage of these men and women, their style, their ways of writing and conveying their thoughts were dark and imponderable, thick and opaque. Others were more open and fluent like certain poets who were able to speak in multihued colors, bringing to life in dramatic fashion the very thoughts of my dark mind.

Like many I've questioned the whole heritage of humanism, of our foundational frameworks bound to ancient pre-Socratic and post-Socratic metaphysical notions that have collapsed and been found wanting in this age of transition and change. All the old philosophies have led to dead ends, leaving many to wonder what is next? Is humanity at an end? Have current registers of thought concerning the Anthropocene and humanities dire impact on the environment and the life of the planet brought us to an end game? In the prospects of answering these questions I was confronted with our investment in technics and technology as a fix for this calamitous situation we've all found ourselves in.

Postmodernisms would dissolve the histories and grand narratives of our past into so much micro-worlds of cynicism, despair, and hyperrealist fanstasias. Our current crop of thinkers makes the call to return to the "Great Outdoors," to the real world where accident, time, and the material realms of actuality exist beyond our stubborn thought and incalcitrant habits have left us in a simulacrum of artificial worlds. The human condition, that age old quandary has left us in retreat from the natural, bound us to millennia of *de-naturalizing* processes that in our time have led us to ponder the awakening of machinic intelligence and transcension into machinic life. Underlying our idealisms, our search for transcendence and immortality has been this secret need to escape our humanity. We know we are unfinished and incomplete creatures, transitional at best on the evolutionary tree.

Maybe that's it: we are imperfect, time-bound, animals who are aware of their impermanence. And in our bid to discover permanency, to continue and endure we have invented these various fantasias of the mind, waking dreams of heavens and hells; and, in our moment of virtual transitions or even its inversion – the migration of the virtual into the actual. From myth to religion, humanistic dreams of exit, escape, and transcendence in the Judeo-Christian West have led to the ultra-puritanism of perfection, of transcending our human nature into machinic life. The human enhancement and transhumanist movements are the outcome in contemporary parlance of these age old mythologies and dreams of religious consciousness.

Technology and capitalism seem to be converging on these NBIC technologies with the hopes of bringing about a literal transformation of re-engineering humanity into an other. Yet, their seems to be a two-fold process being undertaken: one that is infusing the everyday world with intelligence, adding memory, perception, and thought to the everyday objects of our techno-capitalism world of commerce; and, the other is the merger of machine and human, through various modal changes in our actually existing psychic and physical systems. This two-fold process of optimizing intelligence in the objects around us, and the enhancement of the human through re-engineering the genome and biotechnical mutation both are bringing us into what Deleuze and Guattari termed the Mechanosphere. What I like to term the Technocommercium, a

term denoting technology, capitalism, and the creative processes of composition at the heart of our cosmos.

From the traditions of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bataille, Deleuze, and Land a sense of anti-philosophy has preoccupied my studies for some time. This notion of a *libidinal energetics* has been decisive. Land, following Nietzsche's lead would define a base materialist pragmatics that would investigate and diagnosis our human condition and its mutation. For Land the whole Platonic-Christian tradition based as if is in logic and mathematics of the same, equal, and identical has led to a fixed and stable, that is – false artificialization of humanity. Instead we need to break out of this logical and mathematical universe of metaphysics that has locked us into a world based of standardization, unity, and the eternal recurrence of the Same. By unleashing the power of compositions; or, what he'll term the power to conserve, transmit, circulate, and enhance compositions, the power that is assimilated in the marking, reserving, and appropriating of compositions, and the power released in the disinhibition, dissipation, and Dionysian unleashing of compositions. (TA: 31) As he puts it compostionalism is recurrence as the return of compositional impetus across scales of abstraction, the insatiability of creative drive. (TA: 31)

For Land Marx was on the right track but did not go far enough, the problems that have bedevilled Marxian theory can be crudely grouped into two type:

Firstly, there is the empirical evidence of increasing metropolitan profit and wage rates, often somewhat hastily interpreted as a violation of Marx's theory. In fact, the problem is a different though associated one: the absence of a free-market in labour. Put most simply, there has never been 'capitalism' as an achieved system, but only the tendency for increasing commodification, including variable degrees of labour commodification. There has always been a bureaucratic-cooperative element of political intervention in the development of bourgeois economies, restraining the more nihilistic potentialies of competition. The individualization of capital blocks that Marx thought would lead to a war of mutual annihilation has been replaced by systematic state supported cartelling, completely distorting price structures in all industrial economies.

The second problem is also associated with a state-capital complex, and is that of 'bureaucratic socialism' or 'red' totalitarianism. The revolutions carried out in Marx's name have not led to significant changes in the basic patterns of working life, except where a population was suffering from a surplus exploitation compounded out of colonialism and fascism, and this can be transformed into 'normal' exploitation, inefficiently supervised by an authoritarian state apparatus. Marxism—it is widely held— has failed in practice.

Both of these types of problem are irrelevant to the Marxism of Bataille, because they stem, respectively, from theoretical and practical economism; from the implicit assumption that socialism should be an enhanced system of production, that capitalism is too cynical, immoral, and wasteful, that revolution is a means to replace one economic order with a more efficient one, and that a socialist regime should administer the public accumulation of productive resources. For Bataille, on the contrary, 'capital' is not a cohesive or formalizable system, but the tyranny of good (the more or less thorough rationalization of consumption in the interests of accumulation),

revolution is not a means but an absolute end, and society collapses towards post-bourgeois community not through growth, but in sacrificial festivity.

For Land the world is perpetually choked or poisoned by its own riches, stimulated to develop mechanisms for the elimination of excess: 'it is not necessity but its contrary, "luxury", which poses the fundamental problems of living matter and mankind' [VII 21]. In order to solve the problem of excess it is necessary that consumption overflows its rational or reproductive form to achieve a condition of pure or unredeemed loss, passing over into sacrificial ecstasy or 'sovereignty'. (TA: 39)

Ancient societies did this through great projects of building or war, in our age we've perpetually gone through a series of crisis when the saturation of the market became unviable creating a need to depress the market and regulate the flows into new channels which have usually led to austerity, taxation, and authoritarian measures of exploitation and imperial decree. Rather than investing in infrastructure or other avenues of pure loss, modern capitalism has squandered itself in the eternal return of crisis after crisis without ever facing the sacrificial truth underlying its own regulatory mechanisms.

As I've said in many posts before, capitalism per se is not the problem, rather it is the imposition of government and corporate controls and regulations that has brought about the end of sacrificial festivity or the ancient art of the Potlatch. We are locked in a death match with our own excess, our luxury capitalism which will not sacrifice its accumulated power and lust for profits. Instead of spending it hordes its accumulated wealth in the hands of the few, while the many suffer and live on the edge of extinction. Inevitably this will lead to a critical juncture from which this system will not survive. No one can predict the outcome of this only that it will inevitably bring about worldwide conflict, war, and suffering.

Deleuze and Guattari would remind us that "a machine of enslavement overcodes or axiomatizes the earth: these are in no way illusions, but real machinic effects" (TPL KL 10669). The notion of an abstract machine is in Deluzeguattarian terms a "pure Matter-Function — a diagram independent of the forms and substances, expressions and contents it will distribute. We define the abstract machine as the aspect or moment at which nothing but functions and matters remain. A diagram has neither substance nor form, neither content nor expression. Substance is a formed matter, and matter is a substance that is unformed either physically or semiotically." (TP: KL 3079) In fact, diagrams must be distinguished from indexes, which are territorial signs, but also from icons, which pertain to reterritorialization, and from symbols, which pertain to relative or negative deterritorialization.⁴¹ Defined diagrammatically in this way, an abstract machine is neither an infrastructure that is determining in the last instance nor a transcendental Idea that is determining in the supreme instance. Rather, it plays a piloting role. The diagrammatic or abstract machine does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality. (TP: KL 3091)

This notion of not being a part of the old metaphysics of presence, or representationalism but rather of a world of becomings within which diagrams act as abstract machines that are

constructing a “new type of reality” is the central motif of my own latest explorations and experiments on this site. I've always felt we are transitional creatures, caught in the meshes of linguistic and viral political, cultural, and scientific power machines that have contorted our memory and perceptions under systems of exploitation to the point that we no longer have the ability to shape our own destinies. Diagrammatic thought escapes the control mechanisms that bind us to our social and cultural exploitation mechanisms. That a more in depth understanding of this kind of anti-conceptual thought is needed is without doubt. This will be one aspect of my new explorations over the coming months.

We need to move past the old Left or Right political and philosophical matrix of ideas, representations, and thought-forms that have locked us in a void, a return of the Same ideological and political valences year after year in scholarship, philosophy, and socio-cultural theory and praxis. We continue to fall into the same old arguments time and again which never conclude, nor bring about the necessary change to exit or escape the systematic exploitation of humanity in the face of techno-capitalism as it has been concentrated in the latest power elites.

Deleuze and Guattari were on to something, and yet very few of their followers have explored the economic and political aspects of their diagrammatic thinking. I hope to investigate this further...

As Saskia Sassen tells us in her *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* the work of Deleuze and Guattari, for whom “assemblage” is a contingent ensemble of practices and things that can be differentiated (that is, they are not collections of similar practices and things) and that can be aligned along the axes of territoriality and deterritorialization, posit that particular mix of technical and administrative practices that “extract and give intelligibility to new spaces by decoding and encoding milieux” (1987: 504– 5).²

Bernard Stiegler will explicate Gilbert Simondon's notion of technical milieu which influenced Deleuze and Guattari this way:

the associated milieu is used by Simondon to refer to the memory of the psychic individual insofar as it is constantly associated with this individual and as such constitutes his or her psychic milieu, he uses this concept to describe a technical milieu of a highly specific kind: a natural milieu (called a techno-geographical milieu) is referred to as ‘associated’ when the technical object of which it is the environment structurally and functionally ‘associates’ with the energies and elements of which this natural milieu is composed, in such a way that nature becomes functional for the technical system.³

When I've spoken of the virtualization of actuality, this is to describe how the naturalized environment around us has in our contemporary world become functional for the technical systems that now enframe and construct our reality systems or milieux. What Baudrillard would term hyperreality is this infusion of the virtual into the actual and the absorption and appropriation of the actual into the virtual, a process that is at once ubiquitous and naturalized for us in our de-naturalized and artificialized reality systems. We no longer see it or notice it because as Baudrillard kept reminding us we do not have the critical *distance* that critique requires to acknowledge our being trapped in its meshes.

That we are being shaped by forces we barely even recognize exist, much less understand or *think* goes without saying. We have relied on modes of thought and being that for most of human time were adequate to the job of providing descriptions and allowing us to share our thoughts and experiences. This is not so now. We need new thoughts, new ways of thinking and feeling to know and understand the processes of mutation and metamorphosis that humanity is undergoing. We barely even register the fact that we are being shaped and modulated by powers we do not control, better yet – do not even understand or acknowledge. We are at a loss for words and repeat the same gestures over and over and over again... nothing helps, nothing changes, we continue to publish and talk and think we re accomplishing something when all we are doing is turning the dial on our own death. That must change, we must change.

Levity, humor, the ability to lightly step across the past like a dancer as Nietzsche once admonished us is key. The spirit of seriousness is always a killer of thought. One must realize how limited and faulty our mental faculties, our brain is in the evolutionary scheme of things. For all our prowess we are still infants in the cosmic scheme of things, barely out of the evolutionary time vaults. Our brains are bound by the needs of survival and reproduction so that we neglect more than we will ever know about the world within which we live. The realism I espouse is based on this limitation, the accidental nature of our kludgy inheritance and brain functions that exclude most of the world of our reality to better concentrate on survival and sex. So that we come upon other aspects of the unknown by accident, through trial and error. When things fail, when things no longer work for us, when the world goes awry then we realize reality is independent of our minds and not bound by our gaze, our control, our existence. Reality does not need us. Thus we come upon the world, naked and alone.

What Günther Anders describes as 'Promethean Shame' is not the Prometheanism of the self-made egoist and shameless one who breaks with the gods, etc., rather it is the one who comes up against the power of technology which in our time has begun surpassing us in thought, skill, and prowess. This humility before something more perfect than ourselves makes us feel ashamed of our imperfection, our humanity. Because of this many feel a deep need to be elsewhere, to be other than we are...

A few years ago when Ken Jennings a multi-winner on the game of *Jeopardy* was defeated by IBM's Watson he had this to say:

[W]atson won handily. And I remember standing there behind the podium as I could hear that little insectoid thumb clicking. It had a robot thumb that was clicking on the buzzer. And you could hear that little tick, tick, tick, tick. And I remember thinking, this is it. I felt obsolete. I felt like a Detroit factory worker of the '80s seeing a robot that could now do his job on the assembly line. I felt like quiz show contestant was now the first job that had become obsolete under this new regime of thinking computers. And it hasn't been the last. [...] All I know is how it felt to be the guy put out of work. And it was friggin' demoralizing. It was terrible. Here's the one thing that I was ever good at, and all it took was IBM pouring tens of millions of dollars and its smartest people and thousands of processors working in parallel and they could do the same thing. They

could do it a little bit faster and a little better on national TV, and 'I'm sorry, Ken. We don't need you anymore'.⁴

This sense that one is now useless, obsolete, no longer needed pervades many peoples lives. All the hype of automation and the replacement of humans by machines in many jobs that have up to now always been assumed to be an exception, that only humans could perform etc. has left many feeling left out. alone, abject. It's as if what now? No one knows. We all wonder how the future of humanity will exist in a world where machines do all the work. What will humans do? How will they survive and thrive? What role will they have in this future? Any? It's this nagging feeling that we are being obsolesced, turned out to pasture (metaphorically and literally). Depressive realism sets in and we feel like a black hole opened up below our feet, one that is sucking us out of existence.

What I'm naming as the Technocommercium is this technical object (i.e., Hypersphere, Rhizosphere, Mechanosphere as designated by Deleuze / Guattari) that is constructing itself out of our economic, socio-cultural, and technical milieux. That we act as functions within its ongoing construction is without doubt, that we are ignorant of our own part in its construction is also a part of the dark truth of our moment. We think in terms of subject, agency, identity: all fallacious metaphysical concepts that have no place in what I'm describing. The intelligence of matter that is hyperstitionally calling itself into existence through this milieu is non-representable, and not a part of the agential liberal humanist systems of representation or discourse that have been a part of our human heritage. Diagrammatic and functional it is an intelligence in the making of its own conditional systems. It is these systems and our place within the technical milieux of the Technocommercium that I will be exploring from this point forward.

1. Land, Nick. *A Thirst for Annihilation*. Routledge, 1991.
2. Sassen, Saskia. *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Kindle Locations 623-626). Princeton University Press. Kindle Edition.
3. Stiegler, Bernard. *Automatic Society: The Future of Work* (Kindle Locations 1553-1558). Wiley. Kindle Edition.
4. Müller, Christopher John. *Prometheanism: Technology, Digital Culture and Human Obsolescence (Critical Perspectives on Theory, Culture and Politics)* (Kindle): Ken Jennings, 'Watson, Jeopardy and Me, the Obsolete Know-It-All', accessed 9 March 2016, http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_jennings_watson_jeopardy_and_me_the_obsolete_know_it_all/transcript?language=en.

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